



PHOTO BY 2ND LT. GEORGE TOBIAS

Senior Airmen Brandi Grove, 27th Maintenance Operations Squadron, and Marvin Burton, 27th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, prove that Airman Leadership School is not “all work and no play” as they share a snack and a laugh between classes.



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Senior Airman Alfredo Hernandez, 27th Civil Engineer Squadron, occupies the western-themed room sponsored by a local squadron, “an [Air Combat Command] benchmark, that they are looking at implementing Air Force wide,” said Master Sgt. Kim Justice, ALS flight chief. “No more do you come into a dormitory and have the white-walled medical looking rooms.”

ALS more than a change of duty location

By Janet Taylor-Birkey
27th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

The goal of Airman Leadership School, the first portion of professional military education, is simple: to teach Airmen how to be effective supervisors on their way to the noncommissioned officer ranks.

“We want to teach these [Airmen] what it is they are really supposed to be doing and to say, ‘These are all the resources you have to be an effective supervisor, to help your people,’” said Master Sgt. Kim Justice, Cannon ALS flight chief.

Becoming an effective supervisor takes a lot of work, beginning with being an effective student. “They need to have an open mind and pay attention,” said ALS instructor Staff Sgt. Matthew Burgess. “If they put the commitment [into] what we require, then they can be an outstanding ALS student.”

The required commitment for ALS students does not happen only between the classroom hours of 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. As one of only four in-residence schools in Air Combat Command, instructors observe students participating in games, networking and study groups during evening hours. “All the stuff we’ve taught them starts getting put to use,” said Tech. Sgt. Charles Jenkins, who is also an ALS instructor. Students become solidified, which leads to understanding how each group helps accomplish their job, and ultimately, the wing mission, he said.

Staff Sgt. William Finucane, an outstanding ALS graduate said that participating in an in-residence program was both the best and the most challenging part of ALS, adding that Airmen with children face more difficulties than those without children while being gone from home for six weeks.

Staying in-residence “was highly beneficial to my experience,” said Sergeant Finucane. “It’s real important in this work environment to rely on your teammate to watch your back in a wartime situation, to have that team building experience.”

Although initially he did not expect to gain much from his ALS experience, by the end of the six-week school, the outlook for this

hopeful future NCO had changed.

“There are so many beneficial things that an individual can take out of the program, especially ... here at Cannon,” Sergeant Finucane said. “It is just so much superior to a lot of the other programs that are out there around the Air Force. If [Airmen] go into it with more of a positive attitude, looking for what they can gain from the experience, it’s definitely going to be more beneficial for them.”

ALS has come a long way from the days of workbooks and filling in blanks, to a more interactive, hands-on approach, said Sergeant Jenkins, adding that curriculum changes occur as the needs and focus of the Air Force changes. This hands-on approach suits his teaching style well. “I like taking them from the unknown to the known. That’s what drives me.” He said it’s hard to get students excited if he’s not excited about what he’s teaching.

Instructors would like to teach Airmen everything they believe is important for their career, but that is not possible due to financial and personnel cutbacks. History is one area that has been tabled, but due to Cannon ingenuity, it is not totally out of the curriculum.

“If we don’t have history to give to the students ... let’s bring history to the students,” Sergeant Justice said, highlighting Cannon’s Hall of Heroes program.

Mr. Dan McKinney, hero number 7, is brought back to every ALS class to teach the Code of Conduct, regarding his almost three and one-half years as a Prisoner of War. His focus is being strong and taking inventory of leadership skills in order to survive, said Sergeant Justice.

The enthusiasm and effort from the teaching team has landed Cannon’s ALS high kudos. “We’ve had some really great accolades over the past year for our school. We have six Air Force benchmarks here [which] the Air Force is looking at implementing.” These benchmarks include downstairs rooms which are sponsored by squadrons or local agencies, making white-walled, medical-looking rooms obsolete.”

Other benchmarks include being the ACC 2005 Team of the Year award and high compliments from former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Gerald Murray. Sergeant Justice reported that when visiting last fall, Chief Murray said that this is the best ALS in the Air Force he had seen.



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Staff Sgt. Matthew Burgess encourages participation. Instructors say it takes about 24 days for ALS training to make a difference and instructors to see the changes in attitudes. “If [students] put the commitment [into] what we require, then they can be an outstanding ALS student,” he said.



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In an intra-school volleyball match, the Viper Flight took on the Eagle Flight at the fitness center Tuesday. These matches allow instructors as well as students to work together as a team and maintain their physical fitness.



PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. APRIL WICKES

Former ALS students Senior Airmen David Lidell (left), 27th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, and Justin Petrosky, 27th Component Maintenance Squadron, present James Brazell with a shadow box in a Hall of Heroes induction. The Hall of Heroes program is unique to Cannon and has recieved many praises.



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Senior Airmen Eric Atkins, 522nd Fighter Squadron, and Brant Hubl, 27th Civil Engineer Squadron, play foosball during a break between classes. “I think a lot more happens probably after class,” said Sergeant Justice, who mentioned that after-hours games, networking and study groups solidify the class, leading to understanding of how other squadrons function and the wing mission gets accomplished.